

Clam Lake Elk News [First Quarter—January through March, 2006]

Current Status: We had 4 confirmed mortalities this quarter, which raised total observed losses Elk Year 05/06 (20th May 2005 to 20th May 2006) to 16 “observed deaths. The “projected” loss is about 23 animals resulting in an estimated population of about 102 animals.

Elk Research on the Clam Lake Herd: In January we recovered cow 54’s GPS collar and returned it to Dr. Dean Anderson of the UW Madison. Dr. Anderson reported that their National Science Foundation Grant was denied for this year, however, they were encouraged to reapply next application period during 2006. This research project proposes collaring several elk and several wolves with GPS collars and to monitor their interactions over time. Though wolf predation to date has removed mostly males and a few “ancient” cows their impact on the female producing part of the elk population has been limited to only 2 female calves. However, wolf territories in the Clam Lake Elk range are pervasive, and wolf/deer interactions are dynamic. It is likely valuable insights into the impacts of wolves on this elk herd would be gained by this research.

UW Stevens Point has initiated the start of their liver fluke/brain worm/elk investigation. Department elk project staff provided UWSP with 4 adult elk livers from investigated mortalities this past November, December and January. We assisted UWSP project staff with sample collection on January 17th and March 4th. Elk project staff will continue to cooperate in whatever manner we can.

Elk Health Issues: Mortalities: On January 16th, at 1650 hrs. Elk Project Staff received a call from the Sawyer County Sheriff’s Department that a cow had been hit by a west bound mini-van near Forest Road 204. An investigation revealed that an unmarked yearling cow, designated F139 was hit and killed about 75 yards west of the west intersection of Old 77 with STH 77. The van was present and had sustained extensive damage. The 2 occupants were uninjured. They reported that the young cow had been accompanied by a larger cow. The damage to F139 was extensive and we could not salvage any meat for the food pantry. The head and neck was collected for TB and CWD testing, the liver and other major organ samples were collected.

A likely mortalities occurred on January 17th. While checking elk locations Elk Project Staff observed a broken grill and plastic near the intersection of FR 208 on STH 77. A large impact depression and tell-tale tracks indicated that a large elk had been hit by a small truck at this site during the previous night. Tracking the injured animal to the south a few drops of blood were observed about 10 yards from the collision site. The tracks led across to the west fork of the Chippewa River where the animal had appeared to have crossed the river. We have not been able to verify whether this animal died of its injuries.

On February 7th Elk Project Staff investigated a mortality signal for Cow 05. We found her north of STH 77 near the intersection with Old 77. She had been killed by wolves. We collected her head and part of the neck for TB and CWD testing, but little else remained. Her worn teeth indicated that she was about 18 to 20 years old. Our telemetry work indicated that she was spending a fair amount of time on her own.

On March 13th Elk Project Staff investigated a mortality signal for Cow 06. We found her northeast of the intersection of FR 176 and FR 709. She had been killed by wolves. No samples were available—photos were taken.

On March 28th Elk Project Staff investigated a mortality signal for Bull 126. We found him about 100 yards north of the release pen south of FR 176. He had been killed by wolves. No samples were available—photos were taken.

Other elk health issues. On February 2nd Elk Project Staff met with several representatives of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Sawyer and Ashland Sheriff and Highway Departments, and a representative of the Highway Patrol. Jeff Morden, a private system and RMEF member facilitated the meeting. We received commitments from the Highway Patrol and Ashland Sheriff that they'd gear up their speed limit enforcement. The group as a whole supported our going forward with a special radio collar elk crossing warning system developed by Washington State. DOT opposed our proposal for a 45 mph zone 3.9 miles west of Clam Lake on STH 77. DOT offered to assist in applications for funding.

Public Education: During this quarter we gave 6 elk presentations to 386 participants. We also gave 3 interviews to reporters from the print media, 3 to radio reporters and 2 for television programs.

Partnerships: We have ongoing partnerships with UWSP, the RMEF and US Forest Service. As described above we've increased cooperative efforts with WDNR Conservation Wardens on our "feeding" education program.

Monitoring: During this quarter we made 689 telemetry location determinations and 1,325 telemetry mortality checks (mortality plus locations).

Winter of 2005/2006 Elk Trapping: On January 9th we set the trap at a new location, abandoning the site where we were experiencing interference. We 4 successful captures at this site for a total of 29 elk, recollaring 9 of them with adult collars. We then attempted to pre-bait a trap site in the Buffalo Lake area. Wolves bumped the elk away from the trap site and we couldn't re-entice the 208 group back. Abnormal warm temperatures impacted the number of elk we could handle and lure into the trap. To date we've had 13 successful captures of 167 elk (many were recaptures). We only had one animal die related to our handling. An attending veterinarian that conducted the necropsy on this spike bull concluded that the extent of liver damage would have caused this bull's death soon regardless of the handling event. The bull had over 90% of its liver destroyed by liver flukes causing the liver to adhere to the bull's diaphragm.

Upcoming Events: During the next quarter we will initiate our calving season efforts in Mid May. We will be submitting 2 RMEF Project Advisory Committee grant applications, one for the Elk Vehicle Collision Warning System and the other a major habitat development project creating 16 acres of high quality spring forage on a 3,611 acre private property on the west central region of the Clam Lake Elk Range.

Laine Stowell & Matt McKay, April 11, 2006